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Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba

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Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

Contents

Page

III. Replies received from organs and agencies of the United Nations system 2

United Nations Children's Fund 2

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III. Replies received from organs and agencies of the United Nations system

United Nations Children's Fund

[Original: English]
[9 July 2010]

1. The economic and financial embargo continues to have negative effects on the situation and the fundamental rights of children, adolescents, women and families.

2. The impact of the global economic and financial crisis adds up to the embargo effects on the decrease of imported food products destined to children and women and for general consumption (schools, health facilities and day-care centres), which directly affects the health and nutritional status of the population.

3. The areas of education and health services also experience a negative impact, as basic needs for educational material and supplies remain unmet, affecting the quality of education, while shortages of medicines and health supplies hinder, in some cases, the provision of proper or timely health-care services and treatments.

Impact on the Country Programme of Cooperation

4. Commercial limitations increase the price of every item that the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) needs to purchase as part of its projects. Furthermore, they undermines the cooperation of all United Nations agencies, as many of the products must be procured offshore at higher costs.

5. UNICEF, as the other United Nations local offices in Cuba, cannot make use of corporate accounts with United States banks. Therefore, additional administrative measures have to be devised to undertake programme financial operations, resulting in higher costs to the office and a higher administrative burden entailed by the use of third country banks. The related incremented costs have been covered by project support funds that could otherwise be invested in direct programming activities.

Impact on children's fundamental rights

Health

6. In the area of health, services continue to be affected by lack of supplies and medicines. For instance, children being treated at the National Institute of Oncology and Radiology also feel the negative impact of the embargo, as medication, equipment and other items are scarce.

Food/nutrition

7. As the embargo restricts food imports, scarce availability of iron-rich and fortified foods continues to cause iron deficiency anaemia in the population, in particular in children under three years of age, as well as in fertile-aged and pregnant women. This situation has led UNICEF and other United Nations agencies to strengthen joint actions to address the nutrition problem.

Children with special needs

8. Commercial barriers make it very difficult to purchase necessary equipment for children with special needs, including those in need of physical rehabilitation. Specialized equipment for the amplification of sound have deteriorated over the period of their utilization, and replacement has not been possible since they were produced in the United States.

Education

9. The deterioration of school facilities is also owed to the indirect impact of the embargo, because of the limitations on the availability of construction materials. This becomes worse after the effects of natural disasters, like hurricanes and earthquakes. About 200 centres in two provinces, Las Tunas and Camaguey, are being rehabilitated, after hurricanes that occurred in 2008. The limitations on the purchase of supplies have been a factor in the delay of the interventions. For instance, in 2010 UNICEF has been requested to support the rehabilitation of 23 day-care centres in Santiago de Cuba, one of the eastern provinces, where mild but repeated earthquakes have damaged those facilities, causing the relocation of 3,827 children and affecting 3,699 mothers. Also, the availability of text books and educational material is also affected by the embargo, and they are far from meeting the needs of all schools nationwide.

Access to improved drinking water sources and sanitation facilities

10. The latest figures available show that, in 2008, about 22 per cent of families in rural areas do not have access to improved drinking water sources, while 10 per cent do not have access to improved sanitation facilities.